Threads of Indoctrination

The Fine Line Between Guiding the Young and Conditioning Them

Dr. Barkat Charania

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Threads of Indoctrination

The Fine Line Between Guiding the Young and Conditioning Them

By

Dr. Barkat Charania

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Epigraph

"Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each."

— Plato

Wherever the ethical attributes of Justice, Equity, and Fair-Play become compromised in any society, some individuals redirect their agenda through a backdoor called indoctrination.

— Unknown

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Dedication

To all those who, in their childhood, had their “why” dismissed or were discouraged from asking questions — this book is for you.

To the child within me, whose curiosity was mistaken for disobedience.

To the teachers, mentors, and caregivers who chose to guide without imposing conditions.

To those who dare to think, to feel, to question — and who make space for skeptics to ask and be heard.

To my parents, whose traditions I inherited.

To my wife, who stood beside me in all thick and thin.

To my children and grandchildren — may all your questions be welcomed and answered.

Preface

Across generations, elders have guided the young with sincerity, love, and the hope of shielding them from the struggles they once endured. Their teachings—drawn from lived experiences—were offered as gifts, shortcuts through life's maze, so the next generation wouldn't have to "reinvent the wheel."

Yet time teaches us humility. Even decades of experience do not guarantee truth. Beliefs that once offered comfort and clarity may be challenged or overturned by new evidence. What we pass down with authority may not be eternal wisdom, but an evolving understanding. And when such teachings are absorbed uncritically by impressionable minds, especially when we fail to encourage questions, we risk crossing a line. What began as guidance becomes indoctrination.

This book explores that subtle boundary—where teaching ends and conditioning begins, where nurturing transforms into narrowing. It speaks to those quiet moments in homes, classrooms, temples, and mosques, when love, protection, or tradition unintentionally suppress the blossom they intend to support.

We must ask: Where does devotion turn into dogma? When does cultural preservation become intellectual confinement? These questions lie at the heart of this work.

I have lived through immense societal shifts—from rural Gujarat in India, to urban Pakistan, and later to the cities of the United Kingdom and the United States. I have witnessed firsthand how values evolve, how communities adapt, and how beliefs, once sacred, may become outdated or even oppressive. Clothes and

beliefs, not faith or skin, sometimes must be refitted. What once kept us warm may now restrict our ability to move.

Teaching, at its best, invites inquiry. It encourages children to think freely, to question, to imagine, and to reason. Every question deserves an honest answer. Dismissing a child's curiosity can leave lingering doubts that haunt their growth and intellectual development. Unanswered skepticism may cost not only the individual's confidence but also society's chance at nurturing a thoughtful, independent mind.

So, we must remain vigilant, especially in the way we teach. Our homes, schools, and places of worship must be safe spaces for questions and wonder, not factories for conformity. Indoctrination is often silent, unintentional, and well-meaning, but its impact is profound.

This is not a rejection of our elders or our heritage. Rather, it is a reverent pause. A deep breath. A call to teach with humility. It is an invitation to raise not just obedient children, but curious, compassionate thinkers. To offer not a rigid map but a responsive compass. To pass on not just beliefs, but the courage to question them.

Let us remember: Indoctrination is not always loud or extreme. It can be hidden in the everyday practices of teaching, advising, and guiding. It can occur when we insist too strongly on a single path, when we silence doubt, or when we confuse faithfulness with inflexibility. While some forms of indoctrination are blatant and violent—carried out by extremist groups across the world—most are far more subtle, creeping into everyday life under the guise of love, protection, or discipline. It is the latter that we are concerned with here, not the violent one.

Guiding children in faith, culture, and values is natural and a cherished responsibility. But when that guidance becomes rigid, when we discourage reflection or resist adaptation, we risk raising not thoughtful individuals but compliant followers.

Let us teach children the beauty of compassion and the rigor of skepticism. Let us help them navigate reverence and reason. This book is not a rebellion—it is a search.

A search for clarity, truth, and the freedom to ask: What if?

Let this be our call—not to abandon our roots, or our faith, but to enrich them with reflection. Not to erase tradition, but to illuminate it with inquiry.

Let us begin.

Acknowledgments

Despite what I have narrated in the following pages, some may believe I must have had a difficult time in regular classrooms, in particular, and in society in general. But no, I have been relatively lucky. This modern world is murky with many forms of indoctrination, but I was saved from them by my parents, siblings, peers, and many teachers. They were deeply conscious of their role in how they should teach, guide, and encourage.

I recall my parents and uncles, specifically Pir Mohamed and Nazarali Rajani, as well as many other elders, who, although much less educated, were among the most forward-thinking and balanced in their worldview. My brother, who had not completed his education, was modern in his outlook and made it possible for me to become a medical doctor. For five decades of our married life, my wife, Parin, was the one I turned to when I needed to retreat from the emotional toll of being frowned upon for my skepticism over social issues. With patience and empathy, she would listen, discuss, and gently restore my strength for subsequent encounters.

During my surgical training, I was fortunate to work with consultants who were always ready to let me express skepticism, raise doubts, and share my views on subjects at hand. Among them, I gratefully recall my teachers and surgeons, Mr. Morris, Mr. Edwards, Mr. Angel, Prof. Kazi, and Dr. Sulaiman Khan. They all taught me how to and what to ask. At the Aga Khan network, Ashiq Husain and Dr. Manji are two memorable individuals from whom I drew inspiration. At the Eternal Gandhi Museum, Atulji, GVji, Devji, Manishji, and all other trustees are all worth emulating.

Thanks also to the Rehan School of Artificial Intelligence and its

team of teachers, Maryum, Mahek, Noor, Zamir, and Usman, who sensitized us to social medias and AI. Thanks also to my fellow students, Babar, Mazhar, Shamim, Dr Basheer, and Dr Qureshi. Thanks to many others, who allowed me to think and form my own opinions on a wide range of issues, but I am unable to include them all. I remain.

Reader's Guide to Content

Chapter 1 –

This chapter examines the earliest roots of how values are passed down from one generation to the next, drawing on vivid personal anecdotes from childhood and historical references. It explores the innocence of youthful trust and how foundational beliefs are shaped, often without question.

This chapter examines how early childhood experiences with authority figures—parents, teachers, peers, and religious leaders—begin to shape our perceptions of right and wrong, as well as what is acceptable and forbidden. It discusses how obedience is rewarded and questioning is often discouraged from a very young age.

The reader is invited to reflect on the origins of their own core beliefs and whether they have ever truly examined them.

Chapter 2 –

In this chapter, the author takes the reader into the school system and formal education structures. He critically assesses how institutions guide — and sometimes mold — the minds of the young. Through a cross-cultural lens, the chapter challenges assumptions about discipline, authority, and the unspoken curriculum embedded in every lesson plan.

In this chapter, we examine how cultural traditions are passed down and how they can sometimes serve more to control than to preserve. We ask whether cultural pride can coexist with critical thinking, or if questioning customs is seen as betrayal.

Chapter 3 –

This chapter critiques traditional classroom environments, where students are expected to memorize rather than engage in critical thinking. It discusses how institutionalized education sometimes prioritizes conformity over creativity and how the system can marginalize independent thought, and instead, rewards robotic memorization.

Chapter 4 –

Rituals, slogans, and repetition are potent tools of indoctrination. Such tools are brought into action through controlling teachers and parents of children and demanding their obedience. This chapter unpacks how repetition—whether through prayers, pledges, or propaganda—can bypass critical thinking and instill fixed ideas without context.

Chapter 5 –

This chapter examines the delicate balance between protection and control. Elders carry respect and the weight of wisdom. However, the changing times and methods of communication warrant a change in the relationship on both sides. When do rules meant to guide children become mechanisms of suppression? It examines how fear-based parenting or teaching can lead to intellectual and emotional conformity.

Chapter 6 –

We look at how religious, educational, and political institutions reinforce ideologies. We also look at the structure of classrooms. These need to change from simple instructions to the awakening of minds. The chapter discusses how indoctrination is often

institutionalized and legitimized by persons with vested interests, making it difficult to challenge.

Chapter 7 –

This chapter examines the importance of initiating children's education by teaching them to think critically and ask questions. Once they are under authoritarian instructions and not allowed to ask questions, unlearning that and getting them to be inquisitive becomes an uphill task. Additionally, the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. We need to be mindful of how news, advertisements, and entertainment often convey subtle messages, both to adults and children, that influence our beliefs, behaviors, and biases without our conscious awareness.

Chapter 8 –

Fear and faith are central to many indoctrination systems. Once indoctrinated, it is a genuinely complex process to find oneself again, in the same original state of an absorbing mind. It requires a proactive effort, including self-reflection and understanding one's aspirations. This chapter examines how fear of punishment or ostracization is used to keep people aligned with a belief system and how emotional manipulation substitutes for logical engagement.

Chapter 9 –

What do we lose when we conform? This chapter reflects on the personal, social, and intellectual costs of blind compliance, particularly for those who never have the opportunity to question the ideas imposed upon them. It is an exercise that also reveals what we gain when we stop conforming.

Chapter 10 –

This chapter asks whether schools educate or indoctrinate. It also takes one on a journey from being controlled to being free, but it also reveals the aches and pains associated with it. The borders are lost, but the new environment may not be very comfortable to get used to. However, once such courage is built and walked out on the borders, it is liberty of its own class.

Chapter 11 –

How can the cycle of indoctrination be broken? This chapter presents strategies and examples of critical pedagogy, open dialogue, and environments that encourage and foster questioning in a safe and supportive manner. Growing up in infancy and childhood has a distinct possibility of being indoctrinated. The only path out is asking questions, even if it sounds like a betrayal of early teaching.

Chapter 12 –

In this chapter, we propose a model of guidance rooted in empathy, inquiry, and openness. Unlearning is a painful and challenging process, but it is essential to undertake. We ask what it looks like to prepare young minds not to follow blindly, but to think critically and make informed choices.

Chapter 13 –

This chapter addresses the pain and difficulties that one must endure when the comfortable place, likened to a “prison cell,” is lost. There is a steep price to pay for the freedom that has been aspired to. A great deal of courage and resolve are needed, yet the suffering still has to be endured.

Chapter 14 –

This chapter highlights the fact that education and indoctrination share similar methods of teaching, advising, and guiding, but have two distinct concepts and agendas. At first glance, it may seem difficult to decipher the difference between the two, but encouraging critical thinking and continuing to ask questions are key to achieving the ultimate goal.

Conclusion and Passing the Torch

The concluding section reflects on the broader themes of the book and the responsibility of the current generation to create conditions where future generations can thrive intellectually and ethically without fear of questioning the norms they inherit.

Part One

The Malleable Brains of Children

Chapter One

The Seed Was Planted

Summary of Chapter 1:

This chapter examines the earliest roots of how values are passed down from one generation to the next, drawing on vivid personal anecdotes from childhood and historical references. It explores the innocence of youthful trust and how foundational beliefs are shaped, often without question.

This chapter examines how early childhood experiences with authority figures—parents, teachers, peers, and religious leaders—begin to shape our perceptions of right and wrong, as well as what is acceptable and forbidden. It discusses how obedience is rewarded and questioning is often discouraged from a very young age.

The reader is invited to reflect on the origins of their own core beliefs and whether they have ever truly examined them.

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This is how it began:

All our stories have a beginning, which is often not dramatic. It is soft, slow, and almost silent—like a seed falling into the soil

without anyone noticing. The indoctrination process begins just like that—not with a loud declaration but with a gentle, loving word or a quiet rule repeated enough times to become forceful and yet invisible.

We are born into a world already spinning with lots of beliefs, traditions, customs, religions, and truths that are generally considered absolute. Any new idea, though, is looked upon with skepticism, like the Earth is round and not flat, which may eventually be proven to be true. However, as infants, we do not question these truths — we absorb them.

In the quiet corners of my childhood, stories were more than entertainment—they were instructions to be inherited. My earliest memories are not of toys or tantrums but of voices—warm, tired voices of elders recounting tales steeped in tradition, worn smooth by repetition. These stories planted the first seeds of what I believed to be the truth.

Nurturing, Guidance, or Indoctrination?:

We did not call it indoctrination. It was culture, custom, religion, and heritage—what “good people” believed. I did not yet know that belief could be selective or that knowledge could be curated.

I remember sitting cross-legged on woven mats, eyes wide, as the village elders explained the world's origin, the hierarchy of beings, and the divine purpose of obedience. Their words were sacred, their confidence infectious. I was too young to recognize that their certainty was backed by reverence, awe, and fear.

The rhythm of life in our village was deeply structured. There was a time to pray, a time to eat, and a time to recite. Questions, especially the wrong kind, were discouraged. Curiosity was not outright denied, but some questions did not have a clear answer

and were therefore considered doubts. Doubts were viewed as betrayal and dangerous.

So I learned to conform. I became good at listening and better at repeating. I knew what earned approval and what invited punishment. My identity was shaped not by who I was, but by what I was told to be.

This chapter, though set in the innocence of youth, carries the weight of the central theme of this book: the invisible nature of indoctrination. It rarely arrives with banners or threats. It comes as love, tradition, and truth delivered in lullabies. And before we know it, we have inherited a worldview we did not choose—a seed planted in soil we did not till.

But all seeds grow. Eventually, the roots of my belief would stretch against the walls of their container. Questions I dared not ask would begin to whisper in the quiet corners of my mind. Slowly, the soil of my certainty would begin to shift.

The environment of childhood is the first fertile garden where seeds are planted. Family, school, religion, society — all act as gardeners. Some of these gardeners are nurturing and wise. They teach out of love, passing down values and stories to protect us from harm. Others, perhaps mostly unintentionally, but some intentionally, water and fertilize the soil. The seeds begin to grow, without the weight of actual realities.

As a child, I recall moments that seemed insignificant at the time but carried tremendous weight in hindsight. I remember how certain stories were told with pride — about the heroism of our people, to impart lessons from moralistic tales, the holiness of our ancestral religion and rituals, and the righteousness of our way of life.

However, I also remember the silence that followed questions that didn't have easy answers. I learned

early which questions earned praise and which ones brought frowns. Slowly and unconsciously, I internalized a simple message: Some things must not be questioned.

The beauty of childhood is its openness. Children are not born with judgment—they learn what is good and evil, who is "ours" and who is "other." These teachings are wrapped in love, in bedtime stories, in prayers before meals, in festive traditions, and in warnings whispered with care. But even love can cause limits and traditions, taught without room for reflection, can become a quiet prison.

Children need guidance. But guidance becomes indoctrination when it no longer allows room for doubt, curiosity, or deviation. As a child, I was unaware that I was being shaped. I thought I was learning the truth. But what is the truth? Is it what we are told or what we discover? And who decides what a child should believe before learning to think?

Wisdom transfer vs Indoctrination:

In our society, the planting of beliefs is often confused with the planting of wisdom. But they are not the same. Wisdom invites growth, change, and adaptation, while indoctrination demands repetition, loyalty, and silence.

The older generation, shaped by their own experiences and limitations, passes down not only their values but also their fears and dogmas. They want the next generation to succeed, but by their definition of success. They want them to be safe, but by staying within the boundaries they never dared to cross.

Looking back, I realize that the seed of indoctrination is often planted with the best intentions. Parents want to protect their children from the confusion and chaos of the world. Teachers want their students to be disciplined and focused. Religious leaders want their communities to remain united and faithful. But intention does not always equal impact. The seed that was planted in me began to grow into something that shaped my worldview, my identity, and my choices — even when I didn't realize it.

And this is how it begins for many of us, with love that doesn't allow questions. With traditions passed down without pause. With stories told so many times that they become the walls of our inner world. We carry them with us — sometimes proudly, sometimes unknowingly, sometimes painfully.

This chapter is not just the beginning of a book—it is a mirror for the beginning of most of us, to the unexamined inheritance of beliefs, customs, and identities, and to the moments that shaped us before we had the chance to choose. The seed was planted. What it grew into—and how we now choose to tend it—is what this journey is all about.

Role of Family:

The influence of my family extended beyond the walls of our home. Relatives, both near and distant, played pivotal roles in shaping my worldview. I recall visits to my grandmother's house, where the aroma of freshly baked bread greeted us, and stories of her impoverished youth during tumultuous times captivated our attention. Her tales of resilience, of navigating challenges with grace, became lessons etched in my memory.

Family gatherings were events to anticipate. The laughter, the debates, the shared meals—all created a tapestry of experiences

that reinforced our bonds. These interactions taught me the importance of heritage, the value of shared history, and the strength derived from understanding one's roots.

The Seeds of Questioning:

As I ventured beyond the familiar streets of my childhood, I encountered a world both exhilarating and perplexing. The bustling cityscape contrasted with the tranquility of our neighborhood. I was introduced to ideas and philosophies that challenged the very essence of my upbringing. This exposure ignited a series of introspective questions:

Why do traditions hold such sway over our lives?

How do personal experiences shape our perceptions of truth?

In what ways do societal expectations mold our identities?

These questions became the compass guiding my journey of self-discovery. I sought answers in books, in conversations with diverse individuals, and moments of solitude. This quest was not just about finding answers but about understanding the nuances of belief, identity, and authenticity.

Reflections:

Looking back, I realize that each experience, each influence, was a brushstroke in the masterpiece of my life. The lessons of hard work, the richness of cultural heritage, the warmth of community, and the challenges of education have all contributed to the person I am today. Yet, it is the act of questioning, of seeking beyond the visible, that has truly illuminated my path. It has taught me that understanding one's beliefs requires introspection, dialogue, and an openness to change.

In the quiet corners of my childhood, those unquestioned stories whispered and kept whispering. They remind me of elders who spoke with conviction, their words weaving the fabric of my understanding.

I listened, absorbed, and believed them at that time without questioning.

However, as time unfolded, questions began to stir within me.

Were these truths universal, or merely inherited?

Were they guiding lights or were they chains unseen at that time?

I began to see that beliefs, once comforting, could also confine.

I now see that the lessons meant to guide me might also limit me.

And so, I began to review, question, seek, and understand.

This journey led me to recognize the importance of inquiry,

Of challenging the narratives passed down without scrutiny.

For it is through questioning that we find our truths.

And through understanding that we truly come to believe.

Chapter Two

Lessons Without Questions

Summary of Chapter 2:

In this chapter, the author takes the reader into the school system and formal education structures. He critically assesses how institutions guide — and sometimes mold — the minds of the young. Through a cross-cultural lens, the chapter challenges assumptions about discipline, authority, and the unspoken curriculum embedded in every lesson plan.

In this chapter, we examine how cultural traditions are passed down and how they can sometimes serve more to control than to preserve. We ask whether cultural pride can coexist with critical thinking, or if questioning customs is seen as betrayal.

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The Unquestioned Curriculum:

The seed was planted. But as with all seeds, what followed was not a sudden transformation. It was a slow, almost imperceptible

unfolding. Like vines wrapping around a tree, thought after thought, belief after belief, the roots of my understanding of the world were shaped. And these roots, I now realize, did not grow freely. They were guided, gently but firmly, along pre-determined paths. In the name of tradition. In the name of faith. In the name of respect. These paths were never questioned — only followed.

Echoes of Obedience:

Childhood is a curious thing. It is a state of vulnerability and trust so absolute that the lines between love and control often blur. We do not begin life by doubting those who care for us. We believe them fully. We look into their eyes and trust that what they say is right, what they teach is the truth, and what they avoid speaking about is better left unknown. So when a child learns to recite a prayer before they can understand the language it's spoken in, they are not learning the meaning. They are learning the value of not asking. They are learning that tradition is more important than comprehension. That performance is more important than understanding.

At that age, I was unaware of any alternative way to learn. My earliest memories of education were not of asking questions but of receiving answers — prepared, preserved, and handed down like sacred artifacts. I was told what to wear, how to eat, what to believe, who to

revere, and who to stay away from. And I absorbed it all without resistance. Why would I resist? These were not presented as opinions or cultural perspectives — they were delivered as facts. As moral truths. As absolute, universal laws of how the world works and how one must live within it.

Every home is a school. Every adult is a teacher. Every repeated phrase is a lesson. “This is just how it is.” “That is not our way.”

“Good children do not say such things.” “You’ll understand when you’re older.” These were the lessons I grew up with. Not as punishments, not even as scoldings — but as calm, well-meaning explanations. And in that calm, in that certainty, lay something far more potent than fear: belief without inquiry.

I remember the pride in my parents' eyes when I repeated their words, echoed their beliefs, and followed their instructions without hesitation. I was seen as obedient, well-behaved, and “wise beyond my years.” But what did that wisdom really mean? It meant I had learned the rules. It meant I had internalized the limits. I was being praised not for what I knew, but for what I accepted without resistance. That is how the world rewarded a child who asked no questions—with love, approval, and belonging.

In school, the pattern repeated. Education was reduced to memorization. We were taught answers without understanding the questions they were supposed to resolve. We studied history not to reflect on the human condition, but to memorize names and dates. We read literature not to feel the pulse of different lives, but to underline the right passages for the exam. We learned religion not to explore the divine within or without, but to remember verses, rules, and rituals. The purpose was not to open our minds — it was to make sure we fit in. And when someone dared to ask why something was done a certain way, the answer was always the same: “Because that’s how it’s always been done.”

Confusion, Not Rebellion:

It was not rebellion I felt inside — not yet. It was confusion. Quiet, aching confusion. I wondered if everyone else truly believed everything they said, or if they, too, sometimes felt the pull of

doubt. But no one around me spoke of it. And slowly, I began to believe it was not the teachings that were flawed — it was I who was questioning them. So I tucked them away. I learned to separate my thoughts from my words. I smiled when I was supposed to. I repeated what I was expected to say. And I buried my doubts deeper each day.

Looking back, I see how many of us were raised in this way. We were not allowed to be curious in the spaces that mattered most. We were told to question in science class, but never in religious studies. To be creative in art, but never in how we viewed relationships, gender roles, or societal norms. We were told to think, but within the boundaries drawn by someone else, generations before us.

And yet, those early lessons form the architecture of our inner worlds. They determine what we see as usual, what we feel guilty about, what we fear, and what we pursue. They define our identity before we even get the chance to ask if that identity is our own. This is what makes indoctrination so powerful: it does not feel like control. It feels like culture. It feels like love. It feels like home.

Power of Questioning:

It was only much later in life that I began to examine the architecture of my beliefs. To ask: Where did this idea come from? Why do I believe it? What would I think if I had been born in a different house? A different town? A different country? A different religion?

Those questions shook me. And they still do.

Because they revealed that many of my convictions weren't the result of insight — they were the residue of inheritance. Not

through exploration, but through repetition. Not through discovery, but through habit. I was not alone in this. Most people I spoke to — from different cultures, faiths, and traditions — had similar experiences. And yet, so few of us had ever been encouraged to unravel those threads. We were too afraid of what we might find if we pulled at the fabric of our beliefs.

But here's the truth: if a belief cannot survive a question, it was never a belief — it was a command.

The purpose of this chapter is not to accuse, not to shame, and not to look down upon. It is to illuminate. To hold a mirror to the way generations have passed on lessons wrapped in silence. To show how easy it is, even with love, to create a cage and call it home. Indoctrination does not require violence. It only requires that no one be allowed to ask, Why?

And so, as I reflect on the early lessons of my life — the ones taught in classrooms, in places of worship, in kitchens and living rooms — I realize how many of them were given without a room for dialogue. And how different my path might have been if someone had said, You are allowed to ask. You must.

Because authentic learning begins not with the giving of answers, but with the welcoming of questions.

For too long, we accepted lessons without questioning them. But learning without questioning is not growth—it is containment.

Part Two

Shadows and Silhouettes While Growing

Chapter Three

Faith or Fear?

Summary of Chapter 3:

This chapter critiques traditional classroom environments, where students are expected to memorize rather than engage in critical thinking. It discusses how institutionalized education sometimes prioritizes conformity over creativity and how the system can marginalize independent thought, and instead, rewards robotic memorization.

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There comes a point in every thinking person's life when they must confront a difficult question: Do I believe because I have faith, or because I am afraid not to? For much of my early life, I was unaware of the distinction.

Belief was belief. It came with instructions, identity, and reward. It brought belonging. It gave me a place in the world. But what I didn't see then — what most children cannot see — is that what feels like faith may, in fact, be fear wearing a mask.

From my earliest days, I was surrounded by rituals. Some were beautiful — rhythmic recitations, lighting lamps, and sharing meals after prayer. Others were less visible, quieter, but just as powerful — the way specific topics were avoided, the way deviation was met with concern, the way doubt was treated as weakness, or even sin. I followed along, not because I understood, but because I was told. And because I loved those who told me, I did not question them.

But love and truth are not the same. One does not guarantee the other.

In time, I noticed how many beliefs were reinforced not through understanding, but through warnings. Not through reflection, but through repetition. “God is always watching.” “Hell awaits those who disobey.” “Questioning is the path of the lost.” These were not just phrases — they were walls. Walls that contained me. Walls that separated me from other faiths, other cultures, and even parts of myself. The fear of stepping beyond those walls was real. And so, I stayed inside and called it devotion.

I began to realize that much of what had been presented as faith was deeply entangled with fear — fear of punishment, fear of exclusion, fear of divine abandonment. This fear did not always feel like the fire-and-brimstone terror preached in ancient texts. It was subtler. It came in the form of a nervous glance before speaking honestly. A hesitation before admitting doubt. A quiet guilt that grew louder, the longer I kept silent.

After learning about various other faiths, I have come to realize that they all share similar principles. I am neither an atheist nor am I preaching it, because we need faith to propagate Ethics and Morality along with Justice and equality for the world to be peaceful and empathetic.

I realized later that true faith arises from love, specifically the love of humans and empathy, which is almost automatic and inborn, rather than learned or instructed.

I have come to believe that true faith is not born from pressure. It does not arise from trembling before a judging God or reciting words in the hope of avoiding eternal wrath. True faith is gentle. It is curious. It welcomes the unknown and dares to ask questions because it knows that questions do not weaken belief—they refine it.

This is not to say that any belief system is flawed or that faith is unworthy. Quite the opposite. Faith, when free and conscious, is one of the most potent forces in human life. It can inspire kindness, resilience, humility, and hope. But when faith is rooted in fear, which, when forced, is inherited without inquiry or practiced out of obligation, it ceases to elevate and flourish. It begins to suffocate. The distinction between faith and fear is difficult to see, especially when we've never been given the tools to separate them. They can feel almost identical on the surface. Both can produce obedience, ritual, and reverence. But the difference lies deep within: fear is heavy and tight; faith is light and expansive. Fear silences. Faith listens. Fear demands. Faith invites. Fear says, you must. Faith says, you may.

As I grew older, I began to see this contrast in the world around me. I saw people who had memorized holy texts but had never taken the time to reflect on their meaning. I saw others who did not perform rituals but lived with remarkable integrity, kindness, and a sense of interconnectedness that felt deeply spiritual. I saw communities where the most "devout" members were often the most judgmental, and where those who quietly served others were treated as if they were outsiders.

These observations unsettled me. They disrupted the clear lines I had been taught: that there is one right way to believe, and all others are wrong. Most traditions are passed down with little room for questioning.

But I also know that most scriptures encourage the use of God-given intellect and the practice of asking questions to deepen human understanding. They encourage inquisitiveness to seek knowledge, wisdom, and understanding through intellectual pursuit and reflection, and that Intellect and faith are not in conflict.

I know God exists, but would He truly care more about how I performed a ritual or how I treated a stranger? Would He prefer blind loyalty over sincere struggle? Would He be threatened by my questions — or would He welcome them as signs of a mind striving for truth to strengthen my faith?

Traditional teachers do not welcome such questions. But if your belief system cannot survive sincere inquiry, it is not faith — it is fear, disguised as virtue.

I have learned to raise my questions now gently. I no longer see them as signs of rebellion, but as bridges to understanding. I have chosen to walk away from fear-based belief, not to reject faith, but to reclaim it. To rediscover it as something personal, evolving, and alive. A compass, not a cage.

This chapter in my life—and in this book—is not about denouncing belief but about reclaiming it. It is about separating the fear that controls, from the faith that liberates. It is about asking the hard questions, not to destroy tradition but to make it honest. Faith has to have meaning in the modern world, and it must be courageous. It must face the questions that fear avoids.

Ultimately, it is not enough to merely believe. We must know why we believe. Not because we were told, not because we fear the alternative, but because we searched, struggled, doubted, and made a choice.

That is where true faith begins.

Chapter Four

The Weight of Obedience

Summary of Chapter 4:

Rituals, slogans, and repetition are potent tools of indoctrination. Such tools are brought into action through controlling teachers and parents of children and demanding their obedience. This chapter unpacks how repetition—whether through prayers, pledges, or propaganda—can bypass critical thinking and instill fixed ideas without context.

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Obedience is generally a good thing. But should one also abide by wrong or illegal instructions or orders? In our current times on the planet, this has become a topic of discussion and debate. When does an order fall into the area of illegality? When is it in the interest of the public or the nation? For such matters, critical thinking is very essential. We must give a second thought to any and all instructions, without being disobedient.

Obedience is a great virtue, but it is not without pitfalls if followed with a closed mind and without critical thinking. It is praised in schools, rewarded in homes, and glorified in religious texts. It is a quiet agreement, the unhesitating 'yes,' the nod of the head that makes elders smile and society function smoothly. To be obedient is to be seen as good, respectful, civilized—even wise. But beneath that tidy exterior lies something much heavier.

Obedience, when demanded rather than earned, does not liberate the soul. It burdens it. From the earliest days of my childhood, I was taught to obey. Not directly, not forcefully, but gradually — like learning how to breathe in rhythm with the expectations of others. There was no precise moment when I was told, “You must never challenge what you are told.” It wasn’t said — it was shown. Through rewards for silence. Through punishment for curiosity. Through the subtle pride on an elder’s face when a child complied.

I wore the badge of obedience proudly for many years. I believed it was a sign of strength, discipline, and character. And in many ways, it was. There is value in discipline. There is honor in respect. But only when they are chosen. Not when enforced under the weight of tradition, guilt, or fear of rejection. My obedience was not always a choice — it was a survival instinct. It was how I learned to navigate a world that expected me to follow, not to lead. To accept, not to question.

As I grew older, I began to feel the weight of this obedience. It pressed on my chest in the rooms where I wanted to speak but didn't. It curled around my throat when I swallowed questions I was burning to ask. It sat on my shoulders like an invisible burden whenever I chose silence over honesty to avoid disappointing someone I loved.

Obedience began to feel like a cage. A beautiful cage, carved with heritage and lined with the soft cushions of approval — but a cage nonetheless. What made this weight heavier was the fact that it was invisible to those who placed it on me; they saw such inculcation of obedience as their love and as their duty. As proof that they were raising me right. And so, every time I tried to loosen its grip, I felt as if I were betraying not just the rules, but also loving people, my family, and their faith.

To challenge obedience was not just to disobey — it was to disappoint.

And disappointment is a powerful tool. It doesn't shout. It doesn't punish with fists. It punishes with silence. With a look. With a pause in affection. It whispers, 'You have failed us.' And for a child — even for a grown adult — those words can be heavier than any commandment.

But blind obedience, I have learned, is not loyalty. It is not love. It is not respect. It is fear in disguise. Fear of conflict. Fear of loss. Fear of standing alone.

What made this weight heavier was the fact that it was invisible to those who placed it on me. They didn't see their expectations as a burden. To them, it was an act of love — a duty to raise me right.

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And disappointment is a powerful tool. It doesn't shout. It doesn't punish with fists. It punishes with silence. With a look. With a pause in affection. It whispers, 'You have failed us.' And for a child — even for a grown adult — those words can be heavier than any commandment.

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Absolute loyalty is honest. Real love is brave. Real respect invites dialogue, not submission.

I look back now and realize how many decisions I made to avoid shaking the system I had been placed in. I studied specific subjects because they were respected. I avoided friendships because they were frowned upon. I pretended to believe in things I wasn't sure about to maintain peace. And every time I obeyed without question, I drifted a little further away from who I truly was.

That is how unchecked obedience hurts. Today, this is a critique of our ancestors or fathers; tomorrow, our generation will be the fathers and ancestors charged with such criticisms for wanting obedience without question from our children. How can we avert such an obvious possibility?

Let us explore further.

Part Three

Inheritance and Identity

Chapter Five

My Father's Wisdom

Summary of Chapter 5:

This chapter examines the delicate balance between protection and control. Elders carry respect and the weight of wisdom. However, the changing times and methods of communication warrant a change in the relationship on both sides. When do rules meant to guide children become mechanisms of suppression? It examines how fear-based parenting or teaching can lead to intellectual and emotional conformity.

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My Own Voice:

Every child begins life listening before speaking. We listen to stories, instructions, corrections, and prayers, and over time, those voices around us start to form the earliest structure of who we think we are. Among all those voices in my childhood, the most dominant—the most grounding—was that of my father.

My father did not speak often, rarely angrily, rarely harshly, but when he did, the air seemed to still. His voice didn't rise; it resonated. He was not the kind of man who demanded respect with his words — he earned it with his character and reputation

for being fair. There was a weight to his silence, and when he offered advice, it came not like lightning but like steady rain—quiet, persistent, life-giving. He was a man who held traditions close, who honored faith with sincerity, and who believed in the value of discipline, humility, and sacrifice. He was the kind of father whose approval came not with loud celebration but with a gentle nod, a softened gaze, a slight pause in his otherwise composed expression.

To me, he was a personification of strength. His hands, worn and calloused, had built more than just a livelihood — they had built the foundation of our family. His days began before the sun and ended long after it set. He never complained, never blamed, never asked for more than what he needed. And in the quiet rhythms of his life, I saw something sacred — a kind of stillness, a groundedness I didn't yet understand but deeply respected. He was my north star. And as a child, I thought that honoring him meant becoming him.

For years, I absorbed his words without a filter. His words became my truths. His rules, my commandments. There was safety in that mimicry, a sense of clarity. I knew who I was supposed to be, how I was expected to speak, what I was meant to believe. And in those early years, I did not feel the weight of that inheritance. It felt warm. Protective. Like a cloak passed down through generations — worn proudly, never questioned.

But life, as it always does, began to ask more of me than just memorization. The world grew wider. I encountered people who lived differently, thought differently, and worshipped differently. I met individuals whose values differed, or even clashed with mine, not violently, but thoughtfully, compassionately, intelligently. And slowly, a small voice within me — one I had long ignored — began to stir.

It did not shout. It whispered. It asked: What if other ways exist to live a good life? What if some of your inherited beliefs don't fit the person you're becoming? What if honoring your father means walking a path that looks different from his?

These were terrifying questions—not because they were offensive or even uncomfortable, but because they were honest. And honesty, when it goes against tradition, feels like betrayal. However, looking back, it becomes a much-needed correction that we realize later.

My parents were not formally educated. My father could just about sign his name, but my mother could not. But I have seen them raising their ten children, giving them an education they could afford, and while doing that, they had to migrate several times. Their faith was derived from their ancestors, and their depth of wisdom came from association and observations. Their tools were love, compassion, openness, and ethics that they lived by.

The first time I openly disagreed with my father, it wasn't over anything dramatic. It was a small thing — a different opinion about a family matter. I spoke gently, cautiously, but I could feel the shift in the air. His silence was longer than usual. His eyes lingered on mine, not in anger, but in something else—something I couldn't name then. Maybe it was a surprise. Perhaps it was hurt. Or maybe it was the realization that his child, once so obedient, now had a voice of his own.

I carried that moment with me for days. It clung to my chest, heavy and unfamiliar. Had I dishonored him? Had I crossed a line that should not be uncrossed? The guilt was immediate and profound, not because I had said something wrong, but because I had said something different.

And yet, beneath that guilt, I felt something else—something quieter, but undeniable. A sense of self. A small, growing certainty that I had spoken not to offend, but to be honest. That I had not rejected my father's wisdom, but had finally begun to examine it, to see where it aligned with my own experience and where it didn't. That moment was not a rupture — it was a shift. A turning of the soil. The beginning of roots that would be mine.

My father had grown up in a world where identity was clear-cut, where faith meant ritual, obedience meant loyalty, and questioning was associated with a sense of arrogance, not curiosity. His wisdom had kept him afloat in a sea of the unknown. It had shaped his dignity, resilience, and unwavering commitment to family. He had given me that inheritance, not as a burden but as a blessing.

But what he couldn't have foreseen — what many elders cannot — was that the world their children would grow into would be vastly different. The questions we would face, the identities we would explore, the decisions we would have to make — none of them would fit neatly into the templates of the past.

And so, I began that slow, sometimes painful, sometimes liberating process of finding my own voice. I questioned not just what I believed, but why. I read books my father never read. I listened to perspectives he would never have been exposed to. I sat with doubt, not as an enemy of faith, but as its companion. I learned that it was possible to honor the past without being confined by it. In doing so, I began to understand my father more, not less. I saw how his wisdom was shaped by love, by sacrifice, by limitation. I saw that his teachings were not meant to trap me, but to guide me. That even in his firmest rules, there was care. That he, too, had once been a son trying to navigate the expectations of those before him.

My father's wisdom is still a part of me. I carry it in how I speak to those younger than me, in the way I approach decisions, and in the values I hold dear—honesty, integrity, and humility. I always remember that there could be an opinion that is different and yet better than mine, that I should respect. At the end of an argument, we may agree to disagree and still work towards a common goal.

But I also carry something else now: my own voice. It is not always loud, and it may not be very specific, but it is mine. And every time I use it, I feel a little more whole.

There is a beauty in becoming, not in spite of our ancestors, but because of them. There is a sacredness in evolution, not as rebellion, but as continuation. My father gave me roots. My voice gave me wings. And in that union, I have found a space where love and individuality coexist.

This chapter, for me, is not a break from the past. It is a bridge. A way to say: I see you. I honor you. And I must still become myself. Because to live without your own voice, no matter how wise your inheritance, is to live half a life.

I believe now that the greatest tribute I can offer my father is not imitation — it is authenticity. Not blind obedience — but thoughtful reflection. Not silence, but speaking my truth with the same dignity and grace he carried in his silence.

And so, with gratitude for his wisdom and courage in my voice, I continue the journey—not away from him, but forward, carrying the best of him within me.

Part Four

Institutions and Influence

Chapter Six

Classroom of Control

Summary of Chapter 6:

We look at how religious, educational, and political institutions reinforce ideologies. We also look at the structure of classrooms. These need to change from simple instructions to the awakening of minds. The chapter discusses how indoctrination is often institutionalized and legitimized by persons with vested interests, making it difficult to challenge.

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The classroom:

A place we are told is sacred — a gateway to knowledge, a temple of discipline, the cornerstone of a child's future. The room with four walls, a board at the front, and rows of young minds seated neatly in straight lines. And at the front of it all, the teacher — a figure not just of instruction, but of unquestionable authority.

But for many of us, the classroom was not a space of liberation through learning. It was a carefully curated environment where

control was normalized, systematized, and eventually internalized. Control didn't come wrapped in barbed wire. It came in neat notebooks, standardized tests, repeated phrases, and the ever-present unspoken rule: Do not challenge what is written. Learn it. Memorize it. Regurgitate it. Pass. That was enough. That was a success.

The irony, of course, is that when children enter school, their minds are hungry and inquisitive. Children are not born passive — they are curious by nature. Their questions are wild, unpredictable, sometimes inconvenient, but always honest. A child wants to know why the sky is blue, what happens after death, why one person is rich and another poor, and why some people believe in a God while others don't. But in most classrooms, there is little room for such questions. The curriculum is designed not to nourish wonder, but to contain it.

I remember how it felt — sitting in the same wooden desk, day after day, in a room that didn't allow much movement, where silence was mistaken for discipline, and speaking out of turn was punished more swiftly than spreading ignorance.

We learned early on that order was the highest virtue.

Not creativity.

Not depth.

Not exploration.

But order.

Rewarding the Script:

Even subjects that had the potential to unlock freedom, such as history, literature, or religious studies, were reduced to rote

learning. There was only one correct answer. A preferred interpretation. An approved version of events. We learned to underline the teacher's notes, to memorize the highlighted parts of the textbook, and to discard anything that didn't appear in the answer key. Any deviation was dangerous — not because it was false, but because it didn't fit into the system.

The Unasked Questions:

The most tragic part was that we were rewarded for our obedience. The highest scorers, the "top of the class" students, were often those who had learned the skill of suppression the best. They weren't necessarily the most intelligent or the most curious. They were the best at staying within the lines. And the more they followed instructions, the more they were celebrated. Trophies, certificates, applause — all for remembering what others wanted them to know.

We began to confuse knowledge with memory, discipline with submission, and education with conformity.

And slowly, we forgot how to ask questions.

Not because we no longer had them, but because we had learned to fear the cost of asking, the cost of slowing down the lesson, the cost of making the teacher uncomfortable, the cost of being labeled "disruptive," "rebellious," or "ungrateful." We learned to swallow our wonder and replace it with repetition.

Control, in the classroom, rarely wore the face of cruelty. It wore the face of politeness. Of smiles and encouragement, as long as you stayed on script. The punishment for questioning wasn't always detention or scolding — it was being ignored. It was the subtle message that your curiosity was unwelcome here. The

classroom was a machine, and your questions were like noise in the engine.

I began to realize that the classroom wasn't preparing us for the real world — it was preparing us for obedience in systems. Systems that would later appear in jobs, institutions, religious communities, and social structures, where the rules had already been established. The classroom was a rehearsal for adulthood: follow orders, don't disrupt, aim for external validation, and never challenge the structure you are in.

And this wasn't the fault of the teachers alone. Many of them were doing what they had been taught. They were products of the same classrooms, now standing at the front of students instead of sitting among them. They were following a syllabus, teaching for a test, and measuring worth in grades, just as someone had done to them.

There were exceptions, of course. Teachers who defied the model. Teachers who paused the lesson to follow a student's question. Teachers who dared to say, "I don't know, let's find out together." These teachers were rare, and they were memorable. They planted small seeds of

liberation — brief moments where learning felt like play, like possibility, like power. But they were swimming upstream. The larger system favored order over awakening.

Looking back, what troubled me most was how little I questioned it. How comfortable I had become with the script. How I truly believed that being "a good student" meant saying yes more often than asking why? I had confused silence for wisdom. I had mistaken discipline for intelligence. I had become fluent in the language of compliance, and I was rewarded for it.

Years later, when I began to study independently, travel, and meet thinkers and learners from diverse paths, I felt a strange sense of grief. A grief for the questions I never asked. For the curiosity I suppressed. For the version of myself that sat in those classrooms and quietly gave away my voice for an 'A+'.

And yet, I understand now why control works so well. Because it doesn't come all at once. It creeps in — lesson by lesson, rule by rule, reward by reward — until you begin to police yourself. Until you stop needing external force, because the fear of being wrong is already inside you.

A New Vision for Education:

But control is not education. Control is not growth. Control is not wisdom.

Real education is messy. It's full of questions, debates, discomfort, and doubt. It requires teachers who are brave enough to be challenged, students who are strong enough to stand up despite uncertainty, and systems that are flexible enough to allow for contradiction. Real learning is a conversation, not a command.

The classroom should be a space of awakening. A place where students are not shaped into identical products but guided into their becoming. Where knowledge is not consumed blindly but interrogated, examined, and reimagined. Where the teacher is not a dictator of truth but a companion on the path to it.

If I could go back to those classrooms now, I would not sit so quietly. I would not raise my hand only when I was sure of the answer. I would raise it when I was full of doubt. I would ask the questions I feared. I would care less about approval and more

about discovery. But even as I look back with that wish, I look forward with hope.

Because classrooms can change.

And so can students.

And so can we.

Part Five

Reclaiming the Self

Chapter Seven

Unlearning Begins

Summary of Chapter 7:

This chapter examines the importance of initiating children's education by teaching them to think critically and ask questions. Once they are under authoritarian instructions and not allowed to ask questions, unlearning that and getting them to be inquisitive becomes an uphill task. Additionally, the media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion. We need to be mindful of how news, advertisements, and entertainment often convey subtle messages, both to adults and children, that influence our beliefs, behaviors, and biases without our conscious awareness.

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Unlearning does not begin with a decision. It begins with discomfort. It begins with a pause — a sentence you've heard a thousand times suddenly landing differently. A rule you've followed your whole life suddenly feels tight, outdated, and absurd. A tradition you once practiced with reverence now raising a quiet rebellion inside your chest.

Unlearning does not start with knowledge. It begins with unease.

For me, unlearning began not in a single moment, but in a series of quiet awakenings. There wasn't a loud confrontation with the past. There was just a slow peeling back of layers — like realizing the room you've lived in your whole life had windows you never opened. And when you finally do, the light is both beautiful and blinding.

At first, I resisted. The thought that I had to "unlearn" something felt wrong. Why would I unlearn what my elders taught me? What did my teachers spend years drilling into me? What did my culture celebrate? What my faith wrapped in sanctity? Wasn't that betrayal? That was the first lie I had to let go of — the idea that questioning is betrayal. It's not.

Questioning is witnessing. It's noticing that something no longer fits and choosing to explore why. And so, the process of unlearning began with honesty. Not public declarations — just quiet admissions to myself:

"I don't know if I believe that anymore."

"This makes me uncomfortable."

"Why do I feel guilty for thinking differently?"

"What if there's another way?"

These thoughts were like whispers in a storm. Faint at first, but impossible to silence once heard. Unlearning is not easy. It's not clean. It's not quick. Because when you begin to unlearn, you're not just walking away from an idea. You're walking away from a version of yourself — the version that was shaped to please, to obey, to fit in. The version that said yes too easily. That smiled at words that wounded. That called itself loyal when it was actually

just afraid. You don't just unlearn thoughts — you unlearn responses, reflexes, fears, even relationships. You begin to see who in your life encouraged your silence, who applauded your conformity, and who quietly withdrew their love when you started speaking your truth. That realization hurts. But it also clarifies.

I recall the first time I expressed a belief that contradicted what I had been taught to accept. It wasn't dramatic. It wasn't even that controversial. But saying it out loud felt like walking barefoot across glass. I felt exposed. Vulnerable. But also, for the first time in a long time, real. Like I wasn't just playing a role anymore.

That is the strange beauty of unlearning. It is terrifying and liberating at the same time. It pulls the ground out from beneath you — but only to show you you've had wings all along.

Unlearning also forced me to sit with silence, but a new kind of silence. Not the obedient silence of the classroom or the dinner table, but the sacred silence of reflection. I stopped reading what I was told to read and started choosing books that made me uncomfortable. I stopped retelling the same stories and began listening to the ones I had once been warned about. I started asking, not just

What is true? — But who decided this was true? And Whose voice was left out of that truth?

That's when I began to understand that unlearning isn't destruction. It's reconstruction. You don't burn your past — you examine it. You ask: What of this is still useful? What of this is beautiful but no longer serves me? What was given to me out of fear, and what was passed on in love? And most importantly: What do I choose to keep, not because I was told, but because I understand it now in my own way?

Unlearning brought grief. I grieved the time I lost being someone I wasn't. I grieved the friendships that were built on a version of me I could no longer perform. I grieved the comfort of belonging — even if that belonging came at the cost of my truth.

But it also brought clarity. And freedom. And strength.

It taught me that strength is not in how much you endure in silence — it's in how bravely you break that silence. That wisdom is not how much you remember, but how deeply you understand. That faith is not measured by how often you perform rituals, but by how much you live by compassion, truth, and justice. That culture is not about preservation for the sake of pride, but about transformation with purpose.

Unlearning is the beginning of self-trust. It's when your inner voice, long ignored, starts to speak louder than the outer noise.

And once it begins, it never really stops.

You begin to unlearn in one area, and soon, it ripples into others. You unlearn shame, and you begin to speak. You unlearn fear, and you begin to move. You unlearn obedience, and you begin to lead. You unlearn borrowed beliefs, and you start to build your own.

This chapter is not a rejection of those who taught me. It is a reclamation of the right to choose what to carry forward. It is a love letter to the self that finally looked in the mirror and said: You don't have to play small anymore.

Unlearning is not the end of the story — it's the real beginning. It's the moment you stop living in the shadow of someone else's idea of who you should be — and finally, finally, start becoming who you truly are.

Chapter Eight

When I Saw The Mirror

Summary of Chapter 8:

Fear and faith are central to many indoctrination systems. Once indoctrinated, it is a genuinely complex process to find oneself again, in the same original state of an absorbing mind. It requires a proactive effort, including self-reflection and understanding one's aspirations. This chapter examines how fear of punishment or ostracization is used to keep people aligned with a belief system and how emotional manipulation substitutes for logical engagement.

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I had walked for years carrying the weight of others 'voices in my mind. Some were gentle. Others were sharp. Some had been repeated with love so many times that they had blended into my own voice, and I could no longer tell where their expectations ended and my identity began. But somewhere along the way — in the silence after unlearning had begun, after obedience had cracked open, after old beliefs had started to dissolve — I found myself standing in front of something I had avoided my entire life.

A mirror.

Not the mirror that shows you your face — but the mirror that shows you your self. It doesn't live on a wall. It lives inside moments — moments when you finally stop running, when the noise fades, when the role-playing ends. When you look at yourself without the masks you wear for parents, teachers, lovers, society, without the labels, the scripts, the cultural decorum.

Just you.

That mirror does not flatter. It reflects.

And when I finally saw it — really saw it — I did not feel powerful.

I felt naked.

I saw the ways I had performed to belong. The lies I had told myself. The truths I had buried just to keep the peace. The versions of myself I had killed — slowly, silently — so I could continue to be accepted.

I saw the smile I wore to hide the questions, the head nods I gave when I disagreed, the rituals I performed when my heart wasn't in them, and the prayers I mumbled because I was supposed to, not because I was speaking to anything I believed was listening.

And most of all, I saw fear. Not fear of death or punishment — but the quiet, aching fear of disconnection. Of becoming someone my community wouldn't recognize. Someone my family wouldn't know how to love.

That fear had shaped me more than I realized.

It had made me edit myself in conversations. It had made me nod when I wanted to speak. It had made me thankful for people who gave me cages wrapped in compliments. It had made me play roles —the good child, the ideal student, the silent believer — not because I was those things, but because it was easier than disappointing those I loved.

But in that mirror, there was no one to perform for. No audience. No approval to seek. No punishment to fear. There was just me. And the truth is that I have avoided all these years. I had no idea who I was until I was bold enough to ask questions. Until now, I had memorized so many identities — yet when all of them were stripped away, I stood there, not empty, but unfamiliar.

And that was terrifying.

Because for the first time in my life, I realized I would have to start from scratch. Not by finding new labels, but by listening. Listening to a voice that had been silenced since childhood.

A voice that asked dangerous but straightforward questions:

Who are you without them?

What do you believe when no one is watching?

What do you love when no one is applauding?

Who do you become when you are no longer afraid?

I didn't have the answers. But for once, I was willing to look. To sit in the discomfort. Stop asking others to define me and begin asking myself the questions I had spent years avoiding. And as I stared into that mirror, something else happened — something quiet but revolutionary.

I began to forgive myself.

For not speaking sooner.

For believing what I was told without question.

For trying so hard to be perfect.

For staying small, because it made others comfortable.

For mistaking performance for personality.

For thinking that losing love was the same as losing worth.

I felt sorry. Not because I was broken, but because I had carried so many versions of myself that were never truly mine. And finally, I was ready to put them down.

The mirror didn't show me a perfect person. It didn't show me a clear path. It didn't offer me a checklist of who I was supposed to be. It simply reflected honesty. And that was enough. That was everything.

Because honesty, when accepted, becomes freedom.

In that mirror, I saw contradictions—a soul raised on faith but filled with doubt, a mind trained in obedience but desperate for authenticity, and a heart that still ached for approval but was beginning to beat for itself.

And I understood — finally — that I could hold all of it.

I could hold my father's wisdom and still have my voice.

I could honor my culture and still question its flaws.

I could love those who raised me, and still walk a different path.

I could grieve the silence I lived in and still find power in my story.

The mirror did not break me. It made me, it named me.

Not by what others called me, but by what I was finally brave enough to claim.

Not a follower. Not just good. Not obedient.

But alive. Awake. Becoming.

From that day forward, I carried the mirror inside me. And any time I was tempted to shrink again, to perform again, to hide — I would return to it. Not for judgment. But for grounding. Because I had finally learned that becoming who you truly are is not an act of rebellion.

It's an act of remembrance.

A return to the voice you were born with — before the world told you what to say.

Part Six

Liberation from Unnecessary Loyalty

Chapter Nine

Between Loyalty And Liberation

Summary of Chapter 9:

What do we lose when we conform? This chapter reflects on the personal, social, and intellectual costs of blind compliance, particularly for those who never have the opportunity to question the ideas imposed upon them. It is an exercise that also reveals what we gain when we stop conforming.

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Loyalty is a beautiful word. It sounds like love. It feels like home. It is passed down in families like an heirloom—something sacred, something unquestioned. In our communities, it is stitched into every ritual, every rule, every relationship. It is loyalty that keeps families together, loyalty that keeps legacies alive, loyalty that makes us say, “Even when it’s hard, I stay.”

But what happens when staying becomes a prison?

What happens when the love you’re loyal to demands a silence that slowly eats you from the inside?

What happens when the only way to remain loyal is to abandon yourself?

That was the quiet war I found myself in — a battle not between right and wrong, but between love and truth. Between the people who shaped me, and the person I was slowly becoming. Between the world I came from and the one I was being called to step into. And no one warned me that such a war would feel like heartbreak.

No one warned me that growing could feel like betrayal.

For so long, I thought loyalty meant staying the same. I thought being “good” meant aligning with the values I was given, the voice I was handed, the story I was expected to continue. I felt love came with conditions — that to be loved, I had to agree. To belong, I had to obey. To honor my family, I had to live in the image they held for me — even if that image was shrinking me.

So, I stayed small. I spoke softly. I nodded often. I wore the expectations like a second skin. And I convinced myself that this was a strength—that I was being loyal.

But something inside me refused to die. A quiet voice, buried deep beneath the layers of cultural etiquette and religious reverence, kept whispering: This is not all of you. This is not the whole truth. It didn’t shout. It didn’t rebel. It just… endured.

Until one day, I couldn’t ignore it anymore.

I started to say things I wasn’t supposed to say. I started to ask questions I wasn’t supposed to ask. I began to write things I once would have erased before anyone could read them. And with each step, I felt lighter — and lonelier.

Because here’s what they don’t tell you about liberation:

It doesn't feel like freedom at first.

It feels like guilt.

It feels like you’ve let someone down.

It feels like you're walking into a vast, unknown field while everyone you love stands behind you, calling you back.

And you want to turn back. You want to explain yourself. You want to prove that you're not abandoning them — you're just finding yourself.

But words fail. They hear rebellion. They see disrespect. They mistake your awakening for arrogance. And maybe they will, for a while. But liberation is not rejection—the search for a way to love that doesn’t erase oneself.

And so you stand in the space between — between loyalty and liberation — aching for a bridge that doesn’t yet exist.

In that space, I learned how grief and growth often come hand in hand. I cried for the version of me that might never be accepted by those I longed to understand me. I cried for the traditions I loved but could no longer follow blindly. I cried for the stories I would no longer pass on unchanged—not out of rejection, but out of care..

Because I didn’t want to carry forward silence, I tried to carry forward the truth.

And truth is a heavy thing to carry when no one is ready to hold it with you.

So, I kept walking.

I kept walking, not because I was certain, but because I was finally honest.

I realized that absolute loyalty—the kind that comes from love—does not demand you to stay small. Absolute loyalty makes room for your transformation. It asks, "Who are you now? "And how can I know you as you grow? "

But not everyone can give that.

And so, liberation became my path.

Not as a rejection of my past, but as a reclamation of my future.

Liberation taught me that love is not loyalty without limits.

It is not enduring abuse in the name of respect.

It is not agreeing to things that violate your truth, so you can remain in the good books of those who once held you.

Liberation showed me that I could still love my people and choose my peace. I could still honor my lineage and evolve the legacy. I could still say thank you for everything they gave me, and still refrain from mentioning the parts that hurt. That sacred in-between is where the real work begins—where identity is no longer inherited blindly, but shaped with intention.

To become your true self, not in isolation, but while still holding threads of what shaped you, and weaving something new, something yours.

It’s not about cutting ties. It’s about weaving new threads into the fabric—so the pattern still honors the past, but fits the future.

Some people will not understand, some will walk away, and others will call you lost. That is part of the cost. But what you gain in return is clarity, peace, breath, and space to grow into your full self without apology.

There is grief in that space, yes.

But there is also grace.

As I spend more time in this in-between state, I realize that I am not alone. There are others like me — others walking the same tightrope between inherited duty and chosen truth. We look at each other with tired eyes and open hearts. And in that recognition, there is healing.

We are the bridge-builders. The storytellers. The ones who carry both the love of our ancestors and the light of a new way.

We are not disloyal.

We are devoted — just differently.

And we are free, not because we walked away.

But because we finally came home to ourselves.

Chapter Ten

Beyond Borders, Beyond Beliefs

Summary of Chapter 10:

This chapter asks whether schools educate or indoctrinate. It also takes one on a journey from being controlled to being free, but it also reveals the aches and pains associated with it. The borders are lost, but the new environment may not be very comfortable to get used to. However, once such courage is built and walked out on the borders, it is liberty of its own class.

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The Whole Me, Myself Reborn:

There comes a point on the road of awakening when the journey turns outward again — but not in the way it once did.

In the beginning, we look outward for approval, for answers, for roles to play. We define ourselves by our surroundings, by our name, our nation, our place of birth, our family's script, and our religion's instruction. But later — much later — when we begin to return to ourselves, we start to look outward again. Not to copy. Not to belong.

But to connect. To witness. To understand.

That was where I found myself. Somewhere in that quiet space after the great unlearning. After the mirror. After choosing my voice, even when it trembled. I stood at a new threshold — one I hadn't expected. I thought liberation would be the final destination. But it wasn’t. It was only the doorway. What came next was something more profound, wider, and more universal. A question I haven’t yet known how to ask.

But it began with a feeling that I no longer belonged in a single story.

Not fully.

Not anymore.

Evaporating the artificial borders:

I had grown up in a world drawn in thick lines. Borders were everywhere. Lines of culture. Lines of belief. Lines of who was “us” and who was “them.” Lines that told me which ideas were holy and which were dangerous. Which rituals were righteous and which were misguided? Which

people were trustworthy, and those who were “other.”

These borders were rarely spoken out loud. They lived. They were etched into how people were greeted, how truth was taught, and how community was defined. And they were enforced with the soft violence of shame — the kind that tells you not to ask, not to cross, not to think too far beyond the familiar.

And for most of my life, I didn’t.

But as I unlearned, as I let go, as I dared to look into the mirror and keep my eyes open, I began to notice the borders — and how many of them were illusions.

It started slowly.

A conversation with someone who practiced a different religion — and yet spoke the same language of compassion, grace, and presence. A book written by someone from a different part of the world — and yet it echoed the very questions I had been too afraid to ask. A ritual I once judged as strange, now seen as sacred when practiced with intention and heart.

And so the walls began to fade.

One after another.

Not because I stopped believing, but because I started thinking more widely.

I started to see that the truth is not always taught. Sometimes it is felt. That God, however we name Him — or Her, or neither—is too vast to be held within any doctrine. That culture is not meant to be a cage. The heart does not understand the language of separation; it only recognizes resonance.

Borders — I began to realize — were mostly fear in disguise.

The fear of losing identity.

The fear of contamination.

The fear that if I learn from “them,” I will become less of myself.

The fear that truth is fragile and must be protected behind walls.

But truth, when real, does not need protection.

It needs openness.

It requires the willingness to be tested, not torn down, but transformed.

It needs wind, rain, and sun to grow roots, not rust in isolation.

An example of structural indoctrination:

I once managed a hospital with around three hundred employees in a predominantly Muslim society. Half were caregivers, including doctors, nurses, and assistants, and the other half were janitors, both male and female, to attend to patients 'needs.

Janitors were mostly Christians or Hindus because it was considered beneath a Muslim to be a janitor. Although it was an essential service, it was also a low-paid one. They will stay out of your way and try never to cross yours. Meek, poor, some addicted to one or other drug.

Though they felt hesitant, I would not only meet them but also embrace them at festivals like Eid or Christmas. They would feel very uncomfortable, but I will insist.

How did they become janitors, and what motivated them to do so? I looked into it. Born into a family where uneducated parents knew only one job, a job everyone must do to earn a living, they accepted as their lifelong "vocation." I see no reason why any of them could not become a doctor or a nurse. However, they were led to believe that they had no choice. They started working as soon as they could, and the only work they knew was their parents', who worked as janitors. This is structural indoctrination that they are born into.

Becoming one of a large whole sea of humans:

So I stepped across.

I crossed the boundaries of religion. I looked into Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. I noticed that every organized religion or spiritual path was attempting to address the same human longing.

I crossed the boundaries of nations. I lived in India, Pakistan, the UK, and the USA. I found that grief, love, laughter, and longing are universal emotions, expressed in every language.

I crossed boundaries of gender, class, and creed — and I found that wisdom lives everywhere. It is not owned. It is revealed.

I no longer felt loyal to any single narrative. I had not rejected my past, but instead made peace with it.

Because I no longer needed to defend it. Because I no longer needed it to define me.

I began to feel less like an outsider and started being more connected.

There is a difference.

Belonging often comes with conditions.

Connection comes with presence.

Belonging can demand performance.

Connection requires authenticity.

Belonging asks, Will you be like us?

Connection says, Come exactly as you are.

Being one of the ‘whole” is a better destination than merely “belonging”.

No upheaval, revolution, or rebellion, only a reflective pause for review:

I am attempting to review our lives and chart our next steps. I love roots, so there is no question of rejecting them. I love religions because they provide us with a sense of ethos and moral guidance.

I attempt to deepen the meaning of what our ancestors have left us. This is not an attempt to dilute our heritage. It is to define and follow its promise. This is to strengthen traditions and not to lose them.

And that’s what I learned when I began to see the world with a new lens. Not as a place of nations, flags, or temples — but as a collection of souls, all searching for the same light.

Some kneel in mosques, some bow in churches, and some meditate in silence. Some find God in nature, like the naturalists do, while others find peace in movement, music, and the moments between breath and memory.

And all of them-all of us—are simply trying to come home.

Not to a building. Not to a belief.

But to a place inside that finally says: I am free to be whole.

Finding myself by losing my identity:

I used to be afraid of losing my identity, of betraying where I came from, of not being “enough” of anything. But the more I let

go of those borders, the more I realized that my identity was never confined to the walls.

It was the space between and beyond them.

The questions I carried.

The compassion I grew.

The peace I chose, again and again.

The stories I honored without needing to repeat.

The wisdom I claimed from every corner of the world, like picking flowers from many gardens.

I stopped asking, Where do I belong?

I started asking, What am I becoming?

And in that question, I found the answer I didn't know I was looking for.

I am not here to belong to a group.

I am here to belong to the world.

To hold it gently. To learn from it humbly. To walk it bravely, without fear, without armor, without needing every step to be blessed by someone daily.

Beyond borders.

Beyond beliefs.

Beyond the cages of certainty.

There is a vast, open sky.

And beneath it, we are.

Whole.

Unapologetic.

Confident.

And free.

As I carry my father's wisdom, I now meet the world not with walls, but with wonder.

Chapter Eleven

The Courage to Question

Summary of Chapter 11:

How can the cycle of indoctrination be broken? This chapter presents strategies and examples of critical pedagogy, open dialogue, and environments that encourage and foster questioning in a safe and supportive manner. Growing up in infancy and childhood has a distinct possibility of being indoctrinated. The only path out is asking questions, even if it sounds like a betrayal of early teaching.

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Every generation is born into the echo of the one before it—into a world filled with traditions, customs, rituals, and beliefs. We do not enter this world as blank slates. We inherit a silent agreement that our elders have come to live with in a society, because their ancestors also accepted a belief, its rituals, and their traditions and customs. That is how life is. This is who we become, children of our parents, with all that they have inherited, followed, and practiced. This is what we do in an ongoing cycle of inheritance.

And in many ways, this inheritance is beautiful.

It connects us to our ancestors. It gives us structure, language, purpose, and identity. Indoctrination—often seen as a negative word—actually begins from a place of care. It is a form of guidance, passed down from those who came before us, who believe they are offering us tools to survive in a world that once tested them. They teach us what they know, what they've lived through, what protected them, and what gave them strength.

An agenda of indoctrination disguised as teaching and guidance is bad. But some advice is absolutely essential for a child. Honestly, without some form of molding and guidance—that may be maligned as "indoctrination"—a child would be directionless in this complex world. From childhood, we are taught not to touch fire, not to lie, not to steal. We are also taught how to pray, how to speak, and how to respect. We are introduced to our history, our culture, and our faith. These lessons are essential. They are the foundation upon which a stable society is built.

But here lies the tension.

At what point does guidance turn into restriction? When does protection become control? Most importantly, when do beliefs

stop being taught and become chains? Or, worse still, when do those dogmas create enmity and grudge against other beliefs?

I began to ask these questions without hesitation when the teachings I once absorbed began to clash with my lived experiences. I found myself wondering: Why is this tradition so important? Why must we repeat this ritual in this specific way? Some of those rituals and customs may have an indirect benefit, although they may not be immediately apparent or logical.

Why does questioning such beliefs, customs, and rituals feel like betrayal?

These weren't questions of defiance. They were questions of honesty.

It is because they are ingrained so deeply in the system that it takes courage to ask them.

Because questioning the ways of your parents, your teachers, your community—even your own thoughts—is never easy. It feels like shaking the roots of a tree that gave you shade. And yet, how else does real change begin?

The truth is, teaching and guidance are not always negative. They may become negative when they refuse to evolve, when they do not leave room for dialogue, and when they punish curiosity instead of nurturing and nourishing it.

But we must also acknowledge that teaching, guidance, and advice are essential. Some of it carries deep wisdom, earned through generations of trial and error. Some customs and traditions are repositories of beauty, resilience, and moral grounding. They have helped people survive war, migration,

injustice, and isolation. They create a sense of belonging, which every human being longs for.

My own upbringing was filled with such moments—bedtime stories laced with values, religious rituals that taught patience and gratitude, and cultural celebrations that fostered unity and joy. These teachings gave me rhythm, discipline, and a sense of identity. They taught me to care for others, respect elders, seek knowledge, and serve.

And for that, I am grateful.

But I've also learned that even the most well-intentioned teachings can become blind spots if they are not open to being reexamined. If we do not give the next generation the space to think for themselves, we risk turning our love into a limitation. We risk raising children who know how to obey but not how to decide, who know how to follow but not how to lead, and who recite values without understanding their essence.

The courage to question is not about destroying what we've inherited. It's about making it our own.

It's about sifting through the past with compassion, not condemnation. It's about asking: Which of these traditions and teachings still hold value in today's world? Which of them were not context-based and no longer serve us? And which new values must we now create to respond to the realities of a changing world?

To question is not to abandon. It is to participate more deeply. To take responsibility for one's traditions, customs, and beliefs. To stop living on autopilot and start living with intention.

There is no shame in asking, Why? There is only strength.

And it is this strength we must now pass on—not just to the brave child who dares to challenge a rule, but to the elder who may reconsider.

Maybe I was wrong.

Perhaps it's time to update what I taught.

This is what it means to evolve as individuals, families, and societies.

So, let us honor the legacy of those who came before us—not by repeating everything they said, but by embodying the spirit of their love and wisdom, while adapting it to our time. Let us teach our children not only what to believe, but how to believe responsibly.

Let us build homes, schools, and communities where tradition and transformation can co-exist.

Where reverence does not require silence.

Where loyalty does not require blindness.

Where faith is not the absence of questions, but the presence of courage.

Because the future will not belong to those who never questioned.

It will belong to those who questioned bravely—and loved even more fiercely because of it.

Part Seven

Freedom from Artificial Traditions

Chapter Twelve

Reclaiming My Mind

Summary of Chapter 12:

In this chapter, we propose a model of guidance rooted in empathy, inquiry, and openness. Unlearning is a painful and challenging process, but it is essential to undertake. We ask what it looks like to prepare young minds not to follow blindly, but to think critically and make informed choices.

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A painful but much-needed process:

Reclaiming the mind is not a one-time event. It is a continuous process, like waves returning to the shore, repeatedly reshaping the sand each time. It is not loud. It is not dramatic.

It is not a war waged with others. It is a gentle yet firm revolution that begins within. It starts when you realize that not everything you've been taught is sacred, and not everything you choose to let go is betrayal.

After years of living with unquestioned beliefs, something inside me stirred. Not with anger, but with a quiet ache. The ache you

feel when something no longer fits but has been a part of you for so long that you wear it anyway, out of habit, out of fear, out of love. But I had crossed the point of no return. The questions had come. The silence had broken. And I could no longer live someone else's truth while pretending it was mine.

But this wasn't easy.

There's no guidebook on unlearning what you've spent a lifetime calling "truth." No clear instructions on how to separate inherited wisdom from outdated ideology. No safe path through the emotional terrain of grief, guilt, clarity, and awakening. Reclaiming my mind felt like pulling weeds from a garden where some weeds had grown long, was beautiful, and looked even better than my flowers!

I did not hate what I had learned. In fact, I respected much of it. I could see now how much love had been woven into those teachings. My parents, my teachers, my elders—they hadn't tried to imprison me. They were trying to protect me. Their version of guidance was rooted in survival. In the community. In holding together a sense of identity in a world that felt dangerous and unpredictable.

To them, belief was armor.

Tradition was a shield.

Obedience was safety.

But armor can also weigh you down. And shields, when carried too long, can blur your view.

Thanks for their advice, guidance, and teachings, but it's time to decide:

And I do not blame them. I honor them and respect them for the sacrifices they made. For the love with which they passed down what they believed to be good, holy, and true.

But the world they prepared me for is not the world I'm living in.

The language has changed.

The questions have changed.

The battles have changed.

And I realize that I must now prepare myself, with intention, for this world, this life, this generation.

This is the heart of reclaiming: taking back authorship of your inner world.

It does not mean discarding everything that came before. It means sorting through it.

Holding each belief in your hands and asking:

Does this serve who I am now?

Does this align with compassion, with justice, with love?

Does this belief expand my humanity, or shrink it?

Do I carry this because it's true, or because it was expected?

I found that some beliefs were like strong, timeless roots. They held wisdom that had weathered centuries. Beliefs about kindness, generosity, honesty, humility, compassion, empathy, and service stayed with me. In fact, after reflection, they became even deeper. They no longer felt like commandments. They felt like choices I had fully embraced.

But others… others began to feel heavy.

Like inherited burdens, I thought I could not conform to them.

Beliefs that divided people instead of uniting them.

Beliefs that taught shame instead of self-worth.

Beliefs that created fear around doubt, guilt around curiosity, and silence around pain.

I realized I had the right—no, the responsibility-to put some of these down.

But putting them down didn't mean becoming lost or confused. It meant becoming lighter, freer, and more honest. I wasn't erasing my past—I was editing it.

Choosing what stayed.

Choosing what evolved.

Choosing what I would pass forward to those who come after me.

I reclaimed not just my thoughts, but my voice.

For years, I had been afraid to say certain things out loud.

I knew the cost of questioning.

The disapproval.

The distance.

The way people look at you differently when you stop nodding and start speaking.

But what I feared more was losing myself in the process of trying to please others.

Finally, a new me with a reclaimed mind:

So, I spoke.

Not to rebel, but to reconnect—with myself, with truth, with people who could hold space for my questions without shrinking from them.

And that's when something beautiful happened.

I began to meet others who were also reclaiming their minds.

People who had grown up with a thousand "shoulds" were now asking, What if?

People who still loved their faith but now practiced it with openness rather than obligation.

People who still respected tradition but no longer let it define their entire identity.

People who were learning that you don't have to burn down your old house to build a new home.

You can renovate. You can reimagine. You can make space.

This new community—built not on sameness but on sincerity—was healing.

And slowly, the shame began to fade.

The guilt began to dissolve.

And in its place: peace.

Not the peace of silence, but the peace of authenticity.

I began to read more, think more, and observe more—not to find a perfect ideology but to stay vigilant and think.

To remain alive to the complexity of being human in a constantly changing world.

Reclaiming your mind doesn't mean you'll never feel lost again. It means you'll know how to find your way back—with truth as your compass, and love as your guide.

So I continued the journey.

Day by day.

Thought by thought.

Teaching by teaching.

And as I did, something within me shifted permanently.

I no longer feared what I once feared.

I no longer bowed to what I didn't believe.

I no longer confuse loyalty with silence.

And I knew—I had reclaimed my mind.

Not to live in opposition, but to live in freedom.

Not to dishonor my past, but to choose my future.

Not to break the chain, but to reshape it—with gentleness, wisdom, and the courage to choose for myself.

Chapter Thirteen

Freedom Isn't Easy—But It's Worth It

Summary of Chapter 13:

This chapter addresses the pain and difficulties that one must endure when the comfortable place, likened to a "prison cell," is lost. There is a steep price to pay for the freedom that has been aspired to. A great deal of courage and resolve are needed, yet the suffering still has to be endured.

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Freedom is romanticized in books, glorified in speeches, and sung about in songs. But very few talk about the other side of freedom—the ache of it, the grief of it, the weight that comes with becoming fully responsible for your mind, your own beliefs, your own life.

When I first began the journey of questioning, it felt like stepping outside of a familiar house into a storm. That house, built by my culture, religion, family, and community, had its flaws—but it was warm. It was safe. It gave me a place in the world, a script to follow, and an identity I didn't have to build from scratch. Stepping out of it meant stepping into uncertainty. And that

uncertainty came with wind and rain and a silence I wasn't prepared for.

Because here's the truth no one tells you in the beginning: freedom is not easy.

When I began to separate my true beliefs from the beliefs I was handed, I found myself floating in a strange space between two worlds. One foot still inside the system that raised me, the other reaching for something I hadn't fully defined yet. I wasn't trying to become a rebel. I wasn't trying to reject everything. I was trying to be honest.

But honesty, I learned, has consequences.

Distancing from loved ones:

Suddenly, the people who had always understood me didn't. The words I used to speak comfortably felt forced. The prayers I used to recite by heart felt empty without meaning. The rituals that once felt sacred now raised more questions than answers.

And people noticed.

Not always with anger. Sometimes with a quiet distance. Sometimes with pity. Sometimes with frustration wrapped in love. But the message was clear: you're not one of us anymore.

That realization stung. It still does, sometimes.

Because belonging is a basic human need, and when you change, you risk losing it. And yet, to silence yourself just to keep belonging—is to betray your own becoming.

So, I made peace with losing some things: walking away from spaces where I couldn't show up as my full self, with the long

silences between relatives, with the invitations that stopped coming, and with conversations that no longer reached beneath the surface. But none of this came without pain.

Freedom sounds beautiful—and it is—but beauty is often born through discomfort. True freedom is not about doing whatever you want. It's about choosing what aligns with your most profound truth, even when it costs you relationships, comfort, and tradition.

I felt very uncomfortable, more than once, asking myself: Was this worth it?

The answer wasn't always immediate.

But over time, it became clear: yes.

Because in freedom, I found something far more valuable than approval—I found peace—not the shallow peace of conformity, but the profound peace of authenticity. I could finally sit with myself and feel whole. I could speak without editing. I could believe without guilt.

Say "I don't know" without shame.

Ask "why?" without fear.

I began to rebuild—slowly.

It settles down:

Brick by brick, I created a new sense of belonging—not with everyone, but with a few. With people who valued honesty more than appearance, who didn't flinch at questions, and who weren't trying to fix me or shape me but walked beside me as I grew.

This is the beauty of walking away from forced conformity: you make space for genuine connection.

And I found that freedom does not mean you stop loving your roots. It means you redefine your relationship with them. You can still love your community while refusing to follow rules that no longer align with your values. You can still honor your heritage without even questioning the harmful practices within it. You can still have faith while refusing to be blindly faithful.

This kind of love is deeper, and this kind of connection is stronger because it is not based on fear. It is based on choice.

I also realized that the freedom to think differently does not make you better than others—it makes you more you. It's not about arrogance or superiority. It's about alignment. It's about being able to wake up each day and live a life that feels honest.

That is the cost of freedom—and its reward.

You may lose some comfort, some certainty, some people.

But you gain clarity. You gain courage. You gain yourself.

I stopped apologizing for evolving.

I stopped explaining my choices to people who were not truly listening.

I stopped asking for permission to be who I already was.

And slowly, I began to live from a place of grounded confidence.

I no longer needed to fit in.

I needed to belong to myself, to my truth, to the kind of world I was now trying to create.

I belonged to those who accepted me as I was.

A world where we can ask questions without fear.

Where faith welcomes thought instead of silencing it.

Where tradition adapts instead of becoming a prison.

Where identity is chosen, not inherited by default.

This world may still be rare, but I believe we can build it—one honest conversation at a time, one brave choice at a time, one person at a time, reclaiming their mind and stepping into the world not with rebellion but with truth-telling grace.

So yes, freedom is hard.

But it is also holy.

It is worth every lonely night, every silent goodbye, every moment of doubt.

Because what you gain in return is not just a new way of thinking.

It is a new way of being.

One that is free.

One that is fierce.

One that is finally you.

Part Eight

Not a Dilemma — Just the Right Thing to Do

Chapter Fourteen

Dilemma For Parents and Teachers

Promote Teaching, Not Indoctrination — But How?

Summary of Chapter 14:

This chapter highlights the fact that education and indoctrination share similar methods of teaching, advising, and guiding, but have two distinct concepts and agendas. At first glance, it may seem difficult to decipher the difference between the two, but encouraging critical thinking and continuing to ask questions are key to achieving the ultimate goal.

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Education vs Indoctrination: What is the difference:

These are two opposite concepts, although both train young adults. It is easy to mistake indoctrination for education. Both involve the transfer of knowledge, the shaping of minds, and the guidance of the young. But there is a profound difference: education invites thought. Indoctrination demands agreement.

Let us understand it.

Education:

Education is the deliberate and compassionate transfer of knowledge, not to condition, but to cultivate. Teaching, guidance, advice, and education are used to transfer knowledge. The objective is to prepare the recipients, the children, to understand the practicalities of the world and undertake the responsibilities as soon as possible. Our ancestors have trained their generations to face the world for many millennia.

Education is done in homes, classrooms, and communities where questions are not only allowed but encouraged. Where a child can say, “I don’t understand,” or even, “I don’t agree,” without fear of rejection. Where the goal is not to raise thinkers who can go further than we did.

Education and teaching invite free thinking and growth and do not demand loyalty. To stimulate thinking, children are not asked, “Repeat after me,” but rather, “What do you think?”

Indoctrination:

In contrast, indoctrination is a “runaway education system” with an agenda. This may include tampering with books, banning books to hide facts of history, and preaching ideas like the supremacy of race, religion, or caste. This is unnatural and serves the interests of those with vested interests. Ultimately, it harms society and humanity.

Those with vested interests may equate indoctrination with education, but this is not the case.

Education is an open process in which questions and curiosity are always welcome.

In indoctrination, questions and doubts are frowned upon and discouraged because it is a deliberate process of embedding beliefs into young individuals without allowing any inquiry. It does not permit the luxury of exploration or the dignity of dissent, with the soft, sometimes unspoken message of disapproval.

For indoctrination, curiosity is seen as a threat. It teaches children what to think, not how to think. It discourages questions. Indoctrination grows in the stillness of obedience.

This dilemma is not a dilemma:

It has become a dilemma for trainers, teachers, and parents because the process is seen with suspicion. But these are two divergent and distinct processes with their own purpose and objectives. While training and guiding are innocuous, natural, and essential processes, indoctrination is only a thin sliver of that honorable process with a sinister objective, as wise people define it.

So, this ought not be a dilemma for parents and teachers. They must proceed without hesitation to do what they need to. You are in a different cadre with no social agenda except to wish the children well.

Our course of action:

No one knows what tomorrow will bring. There is always uncertainty and the unknown. I would teach our children not to fear uncertainty but to walk through it with courage. I will profess that doubt is not disobedience—it is a doorway to learn more. I will also help them understand that faith can withstand questions and that love, if it is deep, will not disappear when challenged.

When curiosity is silenced, totalitarianism and extremism start getting a foothold. On the contrary, when one person dares to

ask, “Why?” a movement begins. A truth is uncovered. The society grows.

So we pass this task to the next generation—not to believe everything we say but to learn to believe responsibly.

What next?

Parents and teachers must offer protection, but not in the form of imprisonment.

Teach children how to think, not what to think?

Encouraging them to question — even when their questions make me uncomfortable?

The remedy is reflection, discussion, re-evaluation, and review.

We need to hold our own beliefs with an open mind. Admit that we don’t have all the answers.

We must pass this message to the next generation. Please do not believe everything we say; instead, learn to ask questions and then form your own beliefs.

Not to follow our footsteps exactly, but to use our path as a starting point.

Part Nine

Conclusion and Passing the Torch

Chapter Fifteen

The Bottom Line

Our responsibility as elders:

What, then, is our responsibility as parents, teachers, and elders entrusted with shaping the young?

It is not appropriate to hand down anything as a final truth unless it is evidenced by science. Offer the guiding lights with the humility to admit they may one day be outgrown.

Share wisdom, not as commandments carved in stone but as signposts meant to be evaluated and, if necessary, reoriented.

We live in a rapidly changing world. The questions our children will face are not the same ones we were trained to answer. They will navigate the complexities of identity, justice, belonging, and truth that may unsettle even the most deeply held traditions. To prepare them, we must offer more than rules. We must provide tools.

This means teaching empathy, the history of our successes, pride and failures, and the ability to sit with complexity—to hold

several ideas in process and progression, and yet move forward with kindness.

Are traditions a burden?

Some consider traditions a burden. That is not true. Not all traditions are harmful. Many carry the beauty of humanity's survival, the resilience of communities, and the tenderness of rituals. However, when traditions become dogmas—when they divide rather than unite, when they shame rather than guide—then we must be brave enough to pause, to question, and perhaps to change.

Do not let indoctrination a space to thrive:

Indoctrination flourishes when questions are discouraged, doubt is punished, and authority is mistaken for infallibility. Our duty is not to raise children who merely behave well—it is to raise people who live well, who think, feel, and act with integrity, not because they fear punishment but because they understand justice.

There will always be those who attempt to colonize young minds with supremacist ideologies, divisive doctrines, and fear-based teachings. And so, we must be vigilant—not paranoid, not hostile, but awake. We must ask: Are we handing down wisdom or walls? Are we teaching tolerance or taming difference? Are we building a generation of thinkers or a generation of followers?

And we must answer each with honesty.

Because the world needs more than obedience, it requires discernment, courage, and compassion grounded in awareness.

Let us not be afraid of the term “indoctrination.” Let us be afraid of what happens when we deny its existence.

Let us not raise merely loyal children—let us raise wise children.

Let us raise thinkers.

Let us raise listeners.

Let us raise builders of a better future, not prisoners of the past.

This is the bottom line.

Not control, but clarity. Not fear, but freedom. Not silence, but sincerity and an open dialogue.

The future will not be built by those who repeat the past. It will be built by those who reflect on it, learn from it, and dare — lovingly, courageously — to do better.

Chapter Sixteen

A Letter to the Next Generation

Dear one,

If you're reading this, perhaps you're standing at the edge of a choice—the same edge I once stood on. A place where inherited truths begin to feel like questions. Where obedience starts to feel like silence. Where the path laid out for you no longer resembles your own.

And that’s okay.

That’s where the journey truly begins.

This letter is not a command. It’s not a rulebook. It’s not even advice. It is a whisper from one traveler to another, from one soul to another. A message from someone who dared to ask, dared to feel, dared to change—and lived to tell the story.

Let me start by saying: you are not wrong for wondering.

You are not wrong for asking questions that make people uncomfortable.

You are not wrong for needing space to think, to breathe, to understand.

In a world that often rewards blind repetition, your curiosity is not a rebellion—it is a form of wisdom.

You come from generations who meant well. Who taught you what they believed to be true. Who passed down traditions, stories, and customs with love in their hearts. Respect that. Honor it.

But do not let it become a cage.

There is a fine line between heritage and imprisonment. Between guidance and control. Between discipline and erasure.

You have every right to draw that line for yourself.

You are born in a different time, with various tools, different access to information, and different questions. You are not here to relive someone else's journey. You are here to live your own.

And yes, it will be hard.

There will be days you feel alone. There will be people who misunderstand your silence and fear your honesty. You will be called rebellious, lost, brutal, and arrogant.

But here's the truth: you are just awake.

You refuse to let someone else's pen write your life. And that's not arrogance. That's courage.

You owe it to yourself—and to the world—to live as someone who has chosen their values, not just blindly repeated those of others. Someone who acts from understanding, not just tradition.

Someone who can carry the wisdom of the past without being trapped by it.

But don't make the mistake of swinging to the other extreme.

Do not mock what others still believe. Do not carry anger where compassion will serve better. Do not burn everything down in the name of finding yourself. Not everything from the past is broken. Not everything old is obsolete. Wisdom lives in many ancient places. Learn to sort, not just reject.

Build bridges—even when you walk new paths.

And when you find your truth, when it feels right in your bones, live it fully. Speak it kindly. Share it boldly. Let your freedom inspire, not divide. Let your mind be a mirror for others—not to copy, but to reflect their questions back to them.

One day, someone younger will look up to you, just like you once looked up to others. And in that moment, you will have a choice: to hand them a script, or to give them the courage to write their own.

Choose courage.

Choose compassion.

Next generation won't need perfection—they'll need permission.

Permission to ask.

Permission to feel.

Permission to become.

So live in a way that gives others that permission.

That is how you change the world—not by forcing your truth on others, but by living it so fully, so peacefully, that it invites others to find their own.

May you never stop questioning.

May you never forget your roots, even as you grow new branches.

Best wishes with all my heart,

From someone who walked this road before you.

May you live freely, love deeply, and leave behind not just a legacy, but a light.

The Final Thread

As this exploration draws to a close, let us not forget that indoctrination, in all its forms, survives in silence — when questions go unasked, and answers are accepted without reflection. This book has attempted to pull back the curtain on what we often inherit without inquiry.

To those who read these words with an open mind, may you continue the dialogue in your homes, in your classrooms, in your communities. Let this not be the end, but a gentle prod toward a more conscious world.

May each thread you pull unravel not confusion, but clarity.

About the Author

Dr. Barkat Charania is a retired orthopedic surgeon with over 30 years of clinical and academic experience, having served on the faculty of Aga Khan University and worked with global health organizations including UNICEF and WHO. He is also a successful entrepreneur who has launched several ventures across continents.

Now in his eighties, Dr. Charania remains active as a social thinker and writer, drawing upon his life's journey from India and Pakistan to the UK and the United States. He chairs the board of The Forum for Dialogue and Diplomacy, and is one of the trustees of the Eternal Gandhi Museum Houston, dedicated to promoting nonviolence and human values.

This book reflects his lifelong passion for questioning inherited norms and guiding the next generation with wisdom, compassion, and clarity.